

Briefing on U.S. Policy to Africa

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Africa Regional Media Hub

Via Teleconference

May 16, 2012

MODERATOR: Good afternoon to everyone from the Africa Media Hub with the United States Department of State. I would like to warmly welcome our participants who are calling from 15 countries across the continent. Today we are joined by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson. Today's call is on the record and will last approximately 45 minutes. And with that I will open it up to remarks from Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Thank you very much. I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak with all of the journalists from the 15 countries who are on the line today. This is an opportunity for me to share some current thoughts about Africa and our policies with respect to the continent. In the last three years, we have seen significant progress in Africa toward what people everywhere want and deserve – that is the right to freely elected governments that respond to their needs, and that pursue peace, justice and prosperity. The United States' role in Africa is intended to support democratic governance, economic development, conflict mitigation, improved health delivery, and combating a range of transnational issues with our African partners.

The signs of progress across Africa are clear – another democratic transfer of power in Senegal this year; adherence to constitutional processes in Malawi that allowed a new, second female president for Africa to take the place of the former deceased president, President Muthurika; successful elections in Nigeria and Zambia last year; Cote d'Ivoire's remarkable growth effort after its return to democracy in 2011; the process underway in Guinea Conakry to establish a full democratic system; and Niger's return to democracy in 2010.

These are all examples of the wave of democratic progress being led by the people of Africa. Of course challenges remain; however, the progress is unmistakable and inspiring. Even in tough and difficult situations like Somalia – where AMISOM's recent successes against al-Shabaab must be followed by improved delivery of citizen services – we are seeing progress. And of course the conflict between South Sudan and Sudan remains a very serious concern and we call on the government of Sudan and the government of South Sudan to immediately implement the AU Peace and Security Commission Roadmap and UN Security Council Resolution 2046.

Today, I am particularly concerned with the situation in Mali, a glaring exception to the democratic progress we have seen in other parts of Africa. Twenty-one years of democratic governance was swept aside by a few mutinous soldiers who seemed more concerned about their own welfare than that of the people or the nation they were supposed to be serving. Their action has imperiled Mali's territorial integrity, allowed rebels to take over half of the country, set back the country's economic development and reduced the government's capacity to respond to drought conditions in the north.

The strong regional response to the coup in Mali makes clear that this misadventure has no future. The United States fully supports ECOWAS's mediation efforts to help Mali return to democratic rule. But the path is clear – a short term transitional government that leads directly to free and fair presidential elections so that Mali can move forward with re-establishing its tradition of democratic governance is required. The military must step aside completely. Those who have illegally seized power in Mali have no right to remain in power and no strength to address the serious security and humanitarian issues that Mali faces today. The sooner the transition back fully to democratic governance, the sooner Mali, with the assistance of the regional and international allies, can begin to repair the damage.

Similarly, I am deeply concerned about the situation in Guinea-Bissau. We have strongly condemned the military coup and the continued exercise of authority behind the scenes by military leaders in that country. Every effort should be made to restore constitutional order and civilian rule, and the process should follow Guinea-Bissau's constitution. With ECOWAS in the lead, the states in the region should work with the community of Portuguese language countries and other international partners to restore democracy to that country. In democracies the military has no role to play in governance.

I remain absolutely convinced that Africa is at the beginning of an unprecedented period of progress, both politically and economically. Problems such as those that we see in Sudan, Mali, and Guinea-Bissau are no longer the norm across Africa. They are the exception to a much more progressive and promising Africa. Africa's economic potential is already well known. Perhaps less appreciated, but even more important, is the tremendous intellectual, technical and business capital represented by Africa's youth, women and entrepreneurs.

We will continue to work to be good partners to the people of Africa through our support for the five pillars of President Obama's policy towards the continent. We will support Africa's efforts to build strong democracies, to promote sustainable economic growth, to prevent conflicts, to expand access to healthcare and to dramatically improve agriculture, and to address the transnational issues such as food security, climate change, and international crime. It is now time for us to focus on Africa's potential and promise and not to define the continent solely by its problems. Thank you.

MODERATOR: We will begin the question and answer session with a question from journalists gathered in our embassy in Abuja, Nigeria. Please state your name and affiliation before you ask your question.

QUESTION: Alright. My name is Martins Dickson with TV Gotel. My question is this: We have seen democracy being under threat in Africa generally with an evolving number of [word unclear] leaders now, and this has great impact on security and economic development on the continent. What is America doing to take care of this, considering the future of Africa whose majority population is poor and underprivileged and haven't access to social amenities and having a better life?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Thank you very much for your question. We are committed to working with African countries on a bilateral basis to help strengthen their democratic institutions, help promote good governance and to strengthen their parliamentary and judicial systems. We are working also with civil society groups to enhance and increase their participation.

When we see a breakdown or an assault on democracy in Africa, as we have seen in Mali and in Guinea-Bissau recently, we have sought to work with the important sub-regional organizations as they have sought to restore democracy. So in the case of both those countries, we have tried to work very closely with the ECOWAS leadership, both under the leadership of President Alassane Ouattara, but also under the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja.

I think that ECOWAS has been very clear in both of those cases that they want an end to military rule, that the end of the era for coup d'états is over and that the people of those countries want and deserve democracy. So I think that ECOWAS has stood up and stood clearly in favor of what people want. We have to, as a part of the international community, work with the sub-regional organization, and we have to be prepared to put pressure, including sanctions, on the states and on the individuals in those countries who perpetrate military interventions or who seek to retain power through unconstitutional means. So in both of those instances, the United States has acted to cut off its assistance, its non-humanitarian assistance to both of those countries and to identify those individuals who are most responsible, and to sanction them with travel and visa bans.

MODERATOR: The next question comes from our embassy in Yaounde, Cameroon. Please state your name and affiliation before you ask your question.

QUESTION: My name is Eugene Nforghwa. I work for the Standard Tribune newspaper. Many years ago USAID left Cameroon. We now understand they are

returning. Why did they leave in the first place, and what has changed to permit them to come back?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Thank you very much for that question from Cameroon. The decision, I believe, to leave Cameroon had a great deal to do with our own strategy towards the deployment of our personnel and resources abroad. We started to focus more heavily on countries where we thought the greatest progress and benefit would be made from having our personnel on the ground and having greater resources applied to development. In the case of Cameroon, I think we closed our USAID office, but we did not, and I stress we did not, shut down all of our aid programs. We continued to provide a certain degree of development assistance to Cameroon. What is now happening is the return of a USAID presence, and we hope that will help facilitate the better use of the aid money that we are providing to Cameroon today.

MODERATOR: The next question comes from our embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

QUESTION: My name is Jaffer Mjasiri. I work for the Daily News, a local newspaper in Dar es Salaam. My question to your Excellency is that what is the level of U.S. trade and development in Africa, and what is the impact that has so far been recorded as far as peace support is concerned?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: I don't have the figures of U.S. trade in front of me, and I don't want to guess what the numbers are. But I can say that Africa is a significant provider of petroleum products to the United States. Some 18 to 19% of all of our petroleum requirements are sources from Africa. Nigeria is our largest single African supplier and the largest supplier of low sulfur sweet crude to the United States, and it supplies roughly 8 to 9% of our needs, almost exactly the same amount as we get from Saudi Arabia.

We also import a large number of other minerals from Africa. We don't import very many finished products from the continent, even though we have the AGOA legislation. The African Growth and Opportunities Act has opened up the U.S. market to allow some 5,000 products to enter the U.S. from Africa duty free. Most of the products coming in under the AGOA legislation are textile products, leatherwear, footwear, and we also import from South Africa automobiles as well that are shipped into the United States.

The trade could be substantially better and larger. We hope that it will continue to grow. We think that Africa has enormous economic potential. We think that it is the last economic global frontier. We are encouraging American companies to look at Africa as an investment and export destination, and we encouraging African countries not only to

look at American products, but also to look at the American market as one that they can benefit from.

U.S. exports to Africa tend to be large capital goods items. We sell airplanes, Boeings to Ethiopian Airlines, to Kenya Airways, to South African airlines. We are not their principle supplier as we are to Ethiopia and to Kenya Airways. We are a major supplier of airplanes and airplane parts to Air Morocco. We supply large diesel generators, freight trains, diesel locomotives, sophisticated and hi-tech imaging equipment, mining equipment, all of these things on the high end. We do not sell very many consumer products to the African market. Those are coming in from places in Asia, but we do believe Africa is a significant market and an important market.

MODERATOR: Thank you. The next question comes from our embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. Please state your name and affiliation before you ask your question.

QUESTION: Good afternoon, my name is Peter Martell. I work for the Agence France-Presse AFP news agency in Nairobi. My question relates to Sudan and South Sudan and the talks that, under the UN Security Council Resolution, were meant to have restarted today. What progress do you know of that have been made towards the holding of these talks? Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: We continue to work very, very closely with the African Union's High Level Implementation Panel led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki. President Mbeki is in contact with both parties in Juba and Khartoum and has been encouraging both parties to implement fully the seven point plan that is a part of the UN Security Council Resolution and also was a part of the AU Peace and Security Commission's resolution. He is encouraging both sides to put proposals on the table on the key issues that have divided the countries, issues related to oil, issues related to boundaries, issues related to Abyei and also Blue Nile and Kordofan issues.

I do want to say with respect to Abyei, we appreciate very much the quick move by the government of South Sudan to withdraw all of its police forces from Abyei, which was a part of the UN Security Council Resolution and a part of the African Peace and Security Resolution. We encourage, we strongly encourage, the government of Khartoum to act equally as swiftly and courageously in pulling out all of its military soldiers there, and leave the responsibility for handling security in the region to the UN peacekeeping force that is there, the UNISFA force that is there on the ground. We are also urging that further progress be made on the establishment of the joint verification board for monitoring the border. Both sides need to identify their participant monitors and move this forward. While there has not been a full resumption of discussions between the two sides, things are being done. We want them be done much faster with greater alacrity and commitment from both sides.

MODERATOR: The next question comes from Peter Fabricius with Independent Newspapers in Johannesburg.

QUESTION: Yes, thank you very much Ambassador Carson. If I may, thank you for the briefing. If I may ask, where do you see the chief obstacle to the resolution of hostilities in Sudan and South Sudan at the moment? You mentioned the fact that the Sudanese troops still need to withdraw from Abyei as the South Sudanese troops have. What, where do the principle responsibilities lie for getting the countries back to peace?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Let me say that both sides bear a great amount of responsibility for creating the difficulties that exist today. Both sides must bear some of the responsibility. It is incumbent on both parties to seriously negotiate their issues. They have to come to the table and meet on a regular basis and live up to the commitments that they make. It is equally important that both sides recognize that their ability to develop their economies, to create stable institutions and peace is dependent on their ability to work with one another in a peaceful fashion. They must sit down and seriously negotiate their differences and recognize that they cannot make progress on the battlefield. So both sides have an obligation and a responsibility, but it really starts with a commitment on both sides not to resolve these differences militarily, but to do so seriously over the negotiating table under the auspices of President Mbeki.

MODERATOR: The next question comes from our embassy in Harare, Zimbabwe. Please state your name and affiliation before you ask your question.

QUESTION: Thank you very much Ambassador Carson. My name is Tendai Mugabe [ph]. I work for the Herald in Harare. Ambassador Carson, the U.S. government, just like the European Union, has imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe in 2001. But as for the EU, I understand they are actually engaged in intensified negotiations with the government of Zimbabwe at the moment with a view to normalizing relations between the two sides. I just want to know what the U.S. government is doing regarding its position on sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe at the moment.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: The U.S. continues to maintain sanctions on Zimbabwe and will do so until we believe that substantial and irreversible progress has been made in the implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement. Our sanctions are against individuals. They are against some 50 to 60 senior Zimbabwean government officials and equally against some 50 to 60 Zimbabwean companies and corporations that are in control of these individuals or that are under the control of Zanu PF or the military.

Our sanctions are not sanctions that are specific to Zimbabwe as a country. Our sanctions are not designed to punish or hurt the people of Zimbabwe who have been punished enough by the treatment that has been meted out by their own government, but our sanctions are very focused, they are focused against individuals and against companies that are controlled by these individuals or companies that are party controlled or army controlled. We will continue to review our sanctions, and we have taken a few people off the list, not as many as the European Union, but our sanctions will remain in place. Those targeted sanctions will remain in place as long as we do not see sufficient progress in the area of democratization.

MODERATOR: Thank you. The next question comes from our embassy in Accra, Ghana. Please state your name and affiliation before you ask your question.

QUESTION: My name is Dominick Andoh. I write for Business and Financial Times newspaper in Accra. The West African region is most affected in terms of food shortage. What are the specific and direct interventions by the U.S. to support agriculture in West Africa in order to ensure food security? Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Thank you very much. President Obama will, this Friday, on the eve of the G8 conference to be held at Camp David, will be speaking on the issue of food security, agriculture and food self-sufficiency in Africa for the most part. He has invited four African presidents, your own President John Atta Mills, President Yayi from Benin, Prime Minister Meles from Ethiopia, and President Kikwete from Tanzania to this event, which will focus on agriculture.

President Obama has instituted a new major initiative called Feed the Future which is designed to create a green agricultural revolution in Africa of the type that occurred in Latin America and in Asia in the 1960s and 70s and which effectively ended widespread hunger in many places in Latin America and Asia and has transformed places like Brazil into economic powerhouses, and which has ended food insufficiencies in places like India. That green agricultural revolution has not yet come to Africa where some 70% of all African households depend primarily or secondarily on agriculture. President Obama, through Feed the Future program and working with the United Nations and with the G8, is determined to put an enormous spotlight on and focus on agriculture.

Africa has enormous promise and potential in the agriculture field, and there is absolutely no reason why Africa should be a food deficit country and why there should be food insufficiency in the continent and why it cannot, in fact, be a major agro-producer, not only for the continent, but also for export globally and around the world. It is our focus here to step up our efforts in agriculture, and you will be hearing a lot more from the President on this issue over the next few days coming out of discussions here, as I mentioned with four African leaders, including AU Chairman Jean Ping on Friday and Saturday and going into early next week. But it is one of the things that this

President and this administration regard as a major, major project to work with Africa on.

MODERATOR: The next question is from David Lewis with Reuters.

QUESTION: Is the United States concerned that ECOWAS's approach in Guinea-Bissau is essentially ruling out Carlos Gomes Junior's return and in any way legitimizes the junta and its coup?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Thank you very much. We remain very much concerned about what is happening in Guinea-Bissau. First of all, we remain strongly opposed to military interventionism in the continent. We have expressed our appreciation to ECOWAS for its strong statements and its strong commitment to return Guinea-Bissau back to democratic rule. We believe that the country should be returned back to democratic rule as quickly as possible following the constitution that exists in that country. We believe that ECOWAS has an important role to play in helping to advance the democratic agenda, to encourage the military to leave, and to help to bring about stability. But equally, we believe that others can in fact play good supporting roles to ECOWAS, including the community of Portuguese speaking states and others in the international community. I think that it is important that the military step aside. They have been a negative force there. They have been, in many instances, associated with narcotrafficking and with the instability that has prevailed there for far too long. Clearly, we need to see the military out of power. We need to see civilian government brought back according to the lines of the constitution.

MODERATOR: The next question comes from our embassy in Kampala, Uganda. Please state your name and affiliation before you ask your question.

QUESTION: Thank you. Assistant Secretary Carson, my name is John Njoroge. I write for the Daily Monitor in Kampala, an affiliate newspaper with The Nation Media Group. Assistant Secretary, Kampala misses you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Thank you.

QUESTION: My question is in relation to Uganda's human rights standing worldwide. Recent human rights reports have shown a consistent drop in the human rights standing here in Uganda. Amnesty International, for instance, in its recent human rights index said Uganda dropped by 57 points to position 139 out of 178. The Uganda police continues to openly harass journalists, continues to harass human rights defenders. Opposition politicians are consistently brutalized, curtailed from meeting the electorate

and the public at large. A great example is what happened to Ms Ingrid Turinawe. My question is, what is the United States' standing right now on Uganda's human rights record? Secretary Clinton was asked to give a report to Congress in the run-up to the 2011 election. Why did that stop?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Let me say we continue to enjoy very good relations with Uganda, and we continue to monitor very closely the human rights situation in that country. We continue to carry on a dialogue at the highest levels with Ugandan officials about issues of human rights that concern not only the people of Uganda, but also concern us in the United States.

We have taken note of the actions that were carried out against former presidential opposition candidate Dr. Besigye. We thought there was an excess of police reaction to his protest. When things like that have occurred, we have, in fact, made our voices and concerns known. We have taken note of issues related to journalists who have run afoul of authorities, and we continue to watch issues concerning the treatment of gays and lesbians and bisexual individuals. We, and I can tell you very clearly, oppose the passage of any legislation which undermines the rights of any citizen. So human rights are an issue that we remain concerned about. We have, as I say, a very good relationship with the government. We continue to dialogue openly with them about concerns that are raised about human rights. Our desire is to see in Uganda a democracy in practice as strong as the democratic values are in the constitution. You have a good constitution. It is important that everybody be able to operate freely and effectively under that document.

While we are on this issue, I want to say just a couple of other things with respect to Uganda, and it would be remiss of me not to applaud the successful capture this past weekend of Caesar Achellam, one of the two or three top military leaders in Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army. This is a part of a continuing effort to arrest and capture Kony, and I think it was a great success and represents again another victory against one of the greatest human rights perpetrators in the Great Lakes Region. Equally, we find it very useful to continue to work with Uganda as it continues to make substantial progress in its support for stability in Somalia. The Ugandan UPDF has done an extraordinarily good job in its role in AMISOM.

MODERATOR: I think we have time for one more question and that last question will come from our embassy in Dakar, Senegal. Please state your name and affiliation before you ask your question.

QUESTION: Drew Hinshaw from Wall Street Journal. You mentioned earlier U.S. support for ECOWAS which is primarily staffed by Nigerian troops as they attempt to resolve conflicts in Mali and Guinea-Bissau. Meanwhile, Nigeria is also fighting and struggling to fight Boko Haram in its own north. What concrete U.S. support, in terms of

logistics, technical support, financial support, military support, could the U.S. offer or is the U.S. under discussion for offering ECOWAS as it seems to fight three different conflicts, each which seems to be pretty intractable?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Well, let me say that ECOWAS is one of the stronger and more effective sub-regional organizations. We have a high respect for the organization itself. We have a high respect for the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja and we have enormous respect for the current chairman of ECOWAS, President Ouattara and his foreign minister Duncan. I think they have done a very, very good job in leading ECOWAS.

In respect to Nigeria itself, we continue to see Boko Haram as a serious domestic threat to stability in northern Nigeria, and we have, in fact, been in very close contact with Nigerian officials about this situation. We have offered to the Nigerians a wide variety of training to help them to improve their investigation skills, their ability to collect information on the Boko Haram threat, on forensics, to be able to do investigations on post-blast situations. We have also offered them advice on how they can better defend against car bombs and IEDs, and we have worked with their security services, the police, and the military.

But with respect to Boko Haram, we have also said very clearly that we see the solution to this problem as both a security and a socio-economic issue. There has to be a sound security strategy, but there also has to be a sound socio-economic strategy to address the enormous poverty and immiseration which exists in northern Nigeria. Both have to go hand in hand. And so we are willing and open to help Nigeria in trying to deal with this domestic threat and recognize the seriousness of it, but again, as I say, it requires a security strategy as well as a socio-economic strategy to ultimately resolve it.

With respect to both Mali and Guinea-Bissau, in the case of Mali in particular, we remain open to seeing precisely what it is that ECOWAS seeks to do militarily in that country. We think that ECOWAS does have a role, but that role should be clearly defined. It should be carefully thought out, and it should be staffed properly before it is undertaken. I think we have been willing to provide logisticians and planners to ECOWAS Secretariat to help with any planning that they are doing, but the mission and the role must be defined before we make any kind of commitment. And we look at the mission as being critical to what we would do to perhaps help. At this juncture we have not, as far as I have been made aware, been asked for any kind of assistance with respect to Guinea-Bissau.

MODERATOR: Thank you. And that concludes today's call. I would like to thank Assistant Secretary Carson for joining us. And thank all of our callers for participating in today's call. If you have any questions about the call, you can contact the Africa Media Hub at afmediahub@state.gov. We hope you will join us for future events. Thank you.